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Ex-Mercenary Re Aiding Search for Boyce

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A former Rhodesian mercenary and ex-convict was reportedly placed under protective custody in New Jersey Saturday after he apparently began cooperating with federal agents who are hunting for escaped Soviet spy Christopher Boyce.

A source close to the investigation said Frank Abbott Sweeney, 38, was being protected by federal agents after his release on \$250,000 bond by a judge in Newark.

"Technically speaking, he's out on bail," the source said. "But a person can be free and under protection if he does not object to helping himself out."

Sweeney was arrested at his home in Closter, N.J., last Thursday on charges of illegal possession of firearms.

But government affidavits, released in court by an apparent oversight, said federal agents believe Sweeney helped Boyce flee the United States and travel to South Africa.

Federal officials said they were stunned at the release of the documents in court. They apparently were concerned that Boyce would now learn that he was being actively sought in South Africa.

Boyce, 28, is a former employee of TRW Systems Group, a major defense contractor in Redondo Beach. He has been sought since Jan. 21, 1980, when he escaped from the federal prison at Lompoc, Calif., where he was serving a 40-year term for selling the secrets of a CIA spy satellite to the Soviet Union.

According to two letters written by Sweeney and introduced in the court, Sweeney was visited by U.S. marshals as early as last November and questioned closely about Boyce's whereabouts. But it was not clear why they had waited until now to arrest Sweeney, who met Boyce while in the federal prison at Terminal Island.

One letter written by Sweeney reported

ly placed Boyce in an area of South Africa known as the Orange Free State, which is adjacent to the independent black nation of Lesotho.

Sweeney visited South Africa less than a month after Boyce's escape from prison, the court documents said, and remained there for four months. He was there again in January, posing as an anthropologist.

Sources in the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, the South African capital, told The Times that embassy officials are convinced that Boyce is still in the country. They said South African police were "cooperating" with the search.

Interestingly, U.S. marshal "wanted" posters concerning Boyce were posted in South African police stations as early as last August, indicating that U.S. authorities have long been aware of the possible South African connection.

The court documents gave no indication why Boyce, a convicted communist agent, would seek refuge in South Africa, whose government is zealously anti-communist and maintains strict controls on immigration.

The court record suggests that one reason for Sweeney's arrest may have been indications that Sweeney was himself planning to leave the country.

While visiting San Francisco from June 9 to 15, Sweeney reportedly bought airline tickets to fly from Los Angeles to Sydney, Australia, on July 10. On June 20, he canceled the trip, but bought a Sydney ticket with an open departure date.

"He continues to make active plans involving international travel which, it is believed, will place him in proximity with the fugitive," the records said. There are a number of airline flights from Sydney direct to South Africa.

According to the affidavits, marshals followed Sweeney to California in the last two months and checked out long distance tele-

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